



# BIGGIN HILL AIRPORT BUGLE

News from our Airport at Biggin Hill - established 2005



CLUB AND AIRPORT NEWS

BIGGIN HILL AIRPORT SOCIAL CLUB LTD

In Ass. with BigginHillReunited.co.uk

ISSUE No. 105

[www.bigginhillclub.co.uk](http://www.bigginhillclub.co.uk)

1<sup>st</sup> November 2013

## AIRFIELD PERSONALITIES:



**BOB DENWOOD..**

### A B24 LIBERATOR BOMBER

From a young fledgling WWII airman Bob has another interesting ferry flight in an aircraft he was familiar with during his RAF days leaving the service in 1946.

Since this time long ago he had a cherished dream, to have another flight in his dream aircraft.

This all came to fruition in 1975 with a phone call from Capt Don Bullock of Euroworld Ltd, a ferry pilot who had been approached for a quote for ferrying a B24 from Prestwick to the USA.

Having flown in a Liberator, as a wireless air gunner in WWII, his last flight being in 1946, he was looking forward to a possible ferry trip as co-pilot from Prestwick to the USA.

Sadly this wasn't to be as the new owner decided to fly it to the UK.

Finally the aircraft arrived at the Imperial War Museum, at Duxford in Cambridgeshire.

Another, famous Battle of Britain airfield in 1940.

Whilst visiting Duxford with Capt Don Bullock to work on the B17 Flying Fortress which had just been rescued from the clutches of the French Customs (Another story entirely). Bob was able to get inside and renew his acquaintance with the Liberator for the first time in 28 years, wearing the same flying boots he last wore in 1946.

*(Believe this if you want, these boots were made to last because we didn't know how long the war would last).*

Next time you see one of the old war films showing RAF prisoners of war and 633 Squadron, they all have the same good quality boots, made to last.

Clint Eastwood, eat your heart out with ya! one off pair of cowboy boots for just one film.

*(A fistfull of dollars)*

Sorry, seem to have lost the plot a little, let's get back to this lovely wartime aircraft story.

Bob climbed up to the flight deck, and sat in the radar operator's seat which he had so often occupied all those years before, often falling asleep, *(surely a court marshal offence tut, tut)* mesmerized by the rotating baseline on the softly glowing screen.

A trip along the catwalk in the bomb bay brought back memories of Bob of walking along it with the

bomb bay doors opened wide at 4,000 feet with whitecaps of the tossing sea below, now just a short step would put him back on the tarmac.

Up through the little door to the midship section, all still the same, but seemingly more cramped than he remembered.

These aircraft were only designed with young slim litesome people in mind.

They were never designed to squeeze in portly retired airman with experience because these old airman knew how dangerous these postions / gun turrets were.

Well, that is how it appears today, which is quite frightening, when one was young and impressionable, it was exciting.

To have the opportunity to fly in this aircraft once again would be pleasureable.

The B24 had a crew of ten, each had a parachute, life jacket, flares, dinghies, plus torpedoes, sono buoys depending on which role it was destined to carry, bombs etc.,

### WOW! A DREAM COME TRUE

This is Bob's story of his realistic answer to his lifelong dream..!

September 9<sup>th</sup> 1975 at 4.20 in the afternoon, I was literally electrified by a phone call from Don Bullock: he asked me if I wanted to go to the states with a B24 Liberator on a ferry flight.

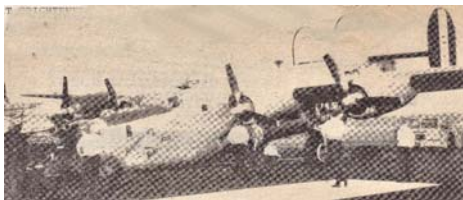
I didn't need asking twice and raced home to collect my Arctic clothing and my passport.

On the way to Prestwick Don filled

me in with the details. The owner, wealthy restaurateur David Tallichet, had set off with an American crew to ferry the plane to the States via Iceland, Greenland and Goose Bay final destination being Barstow, California, where Tallichet had a collection of WWII planes.

An intermediate stop was to be made at Hartford, Connecticut, home of the Pratt and Whitney whose engines powered the B24.

On arrival at Prestwick we became aware of the collapsed nose wheel which had folded on landing, nobody had checked the lock, understandable enough, but a very expensive and very embarrassing mistake.



A newspaper picture, of the aircraft at Prestwick.

As the nose wheel collapsed the undercarriage doors disintegrated under the stress of their ski ride along the runway.

This delayed the flight for several days whilst repairs were carried out by Scottish Aviation engineers.



Delectable Doris on her (feet) wheels again after a successful repair.

Meanwhile the American crew had been checking the weather at these latitudes and distances over freezing water, they “chickened out” leaving the owner Tallichet, crewless.

Scottish Aviation recommended Don Bullock to take over this ferry flight as he had the experience of

the North Atlantic and weather conditions.

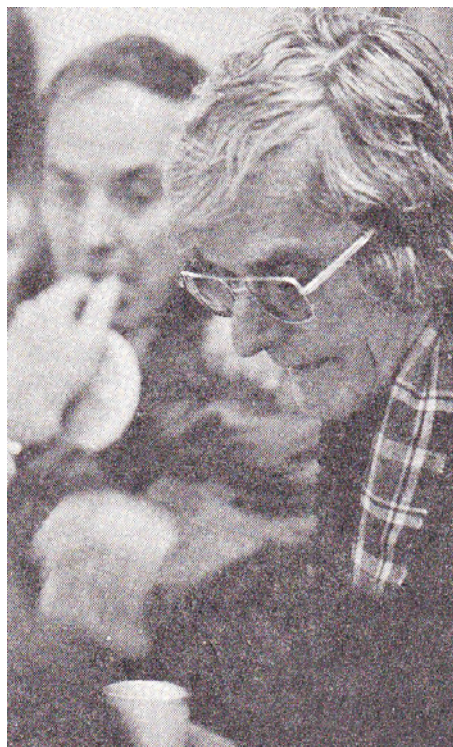
When it came to checking out the aircraft, we started the engines and found that the Artificial Horizon had toppled and wouldn't erect.

The instrument was removed and taken to an instrument technician for rectification.

They couldn't find anything wrong, so we decided it was a wartime Gremlin and replaced it to the instrument panel.

“It worked perfectly” thereafter..!

The next morning we arrived at Prestwick early, eager to get going.



The Pilot owner David Tallichet does a spot of flight planning from Prestwick to Keflavik with Don Bullock looking on whistfully holding his flight calculator.

We climb aboard and get all four engines running after the usual half charged ground power units struggled to turn the starter motors effectively.

Soaring (well rumbling) along at 10,000ft on our way toward Iceland in this veteran aircraft, was like drinking sparkling wine.

The Twin Wasp Pratt & Whitney engines vibrating throughout the

aircraft, a lovely reassuring feeling of power and security.

The acrid tang of exhaust fumes blowing in through the poor fitting seals of the bomb bay doors was exactly as I recalled it.

A quick walk along the catwalk to the back of the aircraft to check the undercarriage was properly retracted and that everything was in order, and our journey had begun. We were soon over the Hebrides on course for Iceland, with the North Atlantic stretching out before us.

I suspect that, although nobody mentioned it, that we were all keeping our fingers crossed and hoping that the rudimentary dinghy drills we had discussed would not be necessary.

Now in the cruise all the engines had settled down and we began checking the gauges, like fuel flow meters, perfidious instrument that they were, lying to us about consumption, and decided they were best ignored as we had loaded ample fuel for the journey. We knew that we had sufficient fuel, although it would have been somewhat reassuring if we had some idea of the actual consumption of each engine.

Especially, if the weather was to deteriorate, and we were faced with a lengthy diversion.

Our arrival at Keflavik after a flight time of 5hrs 30mins was a Red Carpet occasions.

Taxiing to the U.S. Navy base we were besieged by carloads of officers and journalists, very few of whom had never seen a B24 let alone be able to climb in and inspect the cramped quarters occupied by their fathers many years ago, it was amazing how many of them were sons of ex B24 crew during WWII.

Dave Tallichet (owner) had previously called at Keflavik as long ago as 1944 flying a B17 en-route to England to join the struggle against Adolf Hitler.



Early the next day Captain Bligh (DB) was immersed in the interminable paperwork and was champing at the bit for a quick take-off for Goose Bay in Labrador whilst daylight lasted.

Dave however appeared late and had other ideas to land at Sonderstrom, Greenland.

The reason why he was late was that he had been shopping to buy some warm socks to keep his feet warm in the subzero temperature of these unheated cockpits. During the wartime years crews were issued with bulky fleecy lined clothing and boots. Dave had no warm clothing!! I lent him a spare scarf and sweater

Leaving Keflavik the next morning suitably supplied with some welcome in flight nourishment for the flight, courtesy of Uncle Sam including some flasks of hot coffee.

We climbed up to our cruising altitude of 10,000ft I noticed that the cockpit was incredibly cold much colder than Prestwick – Keflavik leg. (-20deg)

I decided to have a look in the navigator's compartment below and forward of the pilot's position. A small hurricane was blowing in around the front turret fairings.

I salvaged a large piece of plastic packing material from the rear of the aircraft and wrapped it around the bulkhead where the pilot's feet were, making it more comfortable.

I then discovered a flexible pipe 1½ in diameter which had been fitted by the Indian AF.

An oily ragged plugged the hole admirably and now everyone was comfortable, cold, but not freezing.



The coastline of Greenland, where iceflows which can reach 60 – 90 miles offshore this time of year.



The ice cap of Greenland rising up to 10,000 a.m.s.l. not the best place to experience any engine failures.



This picture was taken at Sonderstrom before departure to Goose Bay, Labrador. We had to turn each engines over by hand to prevent hydraulicing caused by oil seeping into the inverted cylinders during the hours of being stationary.

Failing to do this simple precautionary task can result in wrecking the engine totally.

Having fired up with the engines ticking over nicely we taxied out completed all engine checks and security checks we lined up and noticed the magnetic compass was 40deg in error and not to be trusted.

*(Editors note: Variation in this part of the world is 32W amongst other things...! crossing each longitude at a different angle + variation and deviation, this would indicate the magnetic compass to be a bit suspect, so therefore not to be trusted...!!!*

*Heading for Goose please, try 272deg).*

So we head out across the North

Atlantic toward Labrador, climbing to a cruising altitude of 10,000ft.

We could now see the cloud banks which towered above our level of flight and dictated that we must climb to avoid them and the risk of icing therein.

Dave continued climbing and by the time we reached 14,000ft the OAT gauge -22deg.

Our breath was clearly visible in the cold draughty interior.

A staccato rattle on the fuselage indicated propeller icing.

A glance at the leading edge of the wing showed ice beginning to form.

No1 & No4 engines were beginning to surge with carburetor ice and we all breathed a sigh of relief as we topped out at 16,200ft, and the OAT registered -30C.

We were all feeling the numbing effect of the cold and the lack of oxygen.

Some hot coffee revived us a little as we settled down to a long slog to Goose Bay.

Eventually the ADF began to show signs we were heading in the right direction and soon we are on finals at Goose Bay after 7½ hours.



This was to be a short refuelling stop as DB wanted to press on to an American field before night fall and we didn't have time to talk with a host of interested plane spotters for the B24, a relic of the past.

The refueller was a typical 'Newfie' who muttered through immobile lips, and had to be asked to repeat each phrase two or three times before we got the gist of what he was saying.

The crowning glory came when he



could only offer us oil in quart cans, with an antediluvian ½ pint funnel with a flexible tube to get the oil into our oil tanks.

With the temperature below zero the thick oil was taking an age to seep through this small tube.

We finally got the 'Newfi' to understand we needed a larger tube, he finally produced a larger cardboard funnel which solved the problem, but it was still no picnic sitting in the open and pouring 56 quarts of turgid oil in a 20 knot sub zero wind.

Having refuelled and replenished the oil tanks, we made a beeline to the terminal area for some hot food.

Visions of juicy burgers and hotdogs were quickly shattered when the listless Newfie counter maid struggling to keep her eyes open and her mouth working told us that the best she had to offer was hot soup and cream crackers

We had the soup and crackers which was horrible, but better than nothing.

Time was slipping by and DB was anxious to get going.

We were soon airborne and heading for slightly warmer climes and sudden delight when Dave (owner) who had done all the flying until now, asked if I would like to take over in the left hand seat.

I thought he would never ask!!!



DB called Loring Airforce Base and requested a technical landing and night stop, thinking they might be interested in this old aircraft.

Loring was a Strategic Base with strict protocol and refused

permission, thinking it was perhaps a try-on by a higher authority.

Don decided that we may as well go to Bangor in Maine and set course accordingly for our penultimate destination.

Note DB map reading on the way to Bangor.



After landing at Bangor the inevitable Customs Officer arrived, firing questions at us, taking no account of the fact that we had all been on the go since 04.00am (not his problem).

We finally shed the clutches of the Customs and headed for the hotel, after which Dave Tallichet treated us to a meal of the famous Maine lobster. We were so tired that before I had taken my second sock off I fell asleep and woke in the morning wondering why it was on my foot..!

It was a beautiful day outside and the sun shone from a clear sky above. We were soon airborne out of Bangor and climbed to a modest 4,000ft with a layer of wispy cloud below, but we could see the ground clearly through large gaps. It was also a little warmer in the aircraft at this lower altitude.



Approaching Rentchler airfield in Hartford, our shadow follows us along the ground as we prepare to join the circuit for the final landing.



The landing gear came down with a thump and I ran back along the catwalk to make sure the locks were secure.



L-R Bob Denwood (Author) Co-pilot. Richard Hladik, Flt Engineer Dave Tallichet, Pilot Owner and Don Bullock, pilot (Euroworld).



One last picture of "Delectable Doris" standing majestically on the apron.

Many admirers appeared from various buildings on this airfield as we the crew, prepare to say goodbye.



## LONDON – DUBAI REUNION

Three ex-pilots from Dubai planned a reunion in London on the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2013. The instigator was Barry Whitmore (Mr Party) an ex helicopter pilot based in Dubai flying to the oil rigs in the Arabian Gulf.

Barry, a Tasmanian, was coming to the UK to visit relatives.

Therefore we should meet for a celebratory drink.

The second pilot was another Tasmanian John Bryan (editor) a Former Instructor / Examiner was also flying out of Dubai, UAE.

The third member would be Stephen Hayman, United Kingdom former Air Traffic Controller at Dubai and now flying Airbus 320's.

During negotiations as to the meeting point Barry had a computer failure.

He sent the following picture to explain how he went to the Aprés Bar at Jebil Ali, Dubai to meet up with his daughter, far left and her friends just happened along, which



he claimed caused his computer malfunction...!



JB, Lydia & Steve Hayman, Barry and Gigi Whitmore having lunch at the Lamb and Flag a traditional ale house in the days of Charles II, close to Covent Garden.

Also known as Blood and Bucket relating to fights held at this place in the days of Charles Dickins.



## RENO AIR RACES – NEVADA

The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this prestigious event was invaded by a contingent of Biggin Hill'ites in support of Sam Whatmough and his Cassutt Race plane shown above as it crosses the line.

Above: Carl ward, (photographer) Rachel, Sam Whatmough, Chrissie Bickerton and husband Gary.

Right: Rachel shares Sam's large trophy he won in the Silver Class.

